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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/FO, EAP/EP, EAP/RSP, EAP/ANP, AND INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECIN](#) [NZ](#) [ASEAN](#) [APECO](#)

SUBJECT: EAST ASIAN SUMMIT: NEW ZEALAND'S VIEWS

REF: 04 STATE 275091

Classified By: ACTING DCM KATHERINE B. HADDA,  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

11. (C) Summary: New Zealand officials have been watching with interest the proposal to hold an East Asian Summit, but they remain unclear as to either the form or function of the meeting. New Zealand would welcome the chance to participate in the Summit, but is unlikely to push for an invitation because of a perception that ASEAN's agenda is already overloaded. China seems to be the driving force behind the EAS proposal, but New Zealand officials think the PRC's goal is to have more control of its dialogue with governments in the region rather than to push for any specific policy goal or to create an alternative to APEC or other groups. END SUMMARY

12. (C) On January 25, Acting DCM discussed the East Asian Summit (EAS) with Sarah Dennis, Director of the South/South East Asia Division at New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Rebecca Needham, a Policy Officer working under Dennis and who covers ASEAN issues, joined the meeting. The South/South East Division has only recently been assigned the EAS portfolio within MFAT, as over the last few weeks the Ministry's small staff -- made still smaller by the Antipodean summer holiday -- was focused on locating New Zealanders missing following the Boxing Day tsunami.

13. (C) Dennis admitted that New Zealand officials do not know a great deal about the form or agenda of the EAS, and she said this was because even the Summit's core participants seem still to be working out the details. New Zealand has actually been watching the proposal since last year, mainly through reporting done by the country's missions in the region.

14. (C) ASEAN 3 has become a fixture of the ASEAN calendar, Dennis said, and she has perceived both interest and some nervousness about the EAS proposal -- and specifically China's role -- among ASEAN members. In New Zealand's view, China's diplomacy on the EAS has been constructive and open to ASEAN input, and the members seem keen to work with China although their suspicions remain. Dennis said it remains unclear what the content of the EAS would be, but China has made clear that it wants to have the ASEAN region relatively secure and growing economically, so it seems likely that the Summit agenda would cover both economic and security issues.

15. (C) A/DCM noted that because Taiwan and Hong Kong participate in APEC, China had resisted efforts by the U.S. and others (including New Zealand) to discuss counter-terrorism issues in that forum. She asked whether it was possible that for this reason China saw a potential EAS security agenda as an alternative to APEC. Dennis and Needham said they were unaware that China was seeking an alternative grouping in which to discuss security issues, although they did agree that China might be trying to take a strategic position that would allow them a more central role in shaping a regional agenda than would be possible under ASEAN 3.

16. (C) Dennis said her impression is that China floated the EAS idea (although some say it was Japan) and ASEAN was initially cautious about the proposal because members preferred the control afforded them by the current ASEAN 3 format. By the time of the Vientiane Summit, New Zealand officials were somewhat surprised to find that the ASEAN 3 Leaders had agreed to the EAS, to be hosted by Malaysia.

17. (C) Dennis said that it was still not clear which countries would participate in the EAS, nor even whether or not ASEAN members would (as seems likely) attend as individual countries rather than as a bloc or whether this would be a one-off or annual event. Leaders participating in the December ASEAN 3 meeting said that the EAS would be in addition to ASEAN 3, but some members have told Dennis that the EAS would replace the existing forum. ASEAN 3 officials are now tasked to decide when and where the EAS will be, and who will attend. Dennis said that New Zealand officials are not on the inside of this process, but she speculated that ASEAN Foreign Ministers may make the final decisions when they meet in March. At the latest, the details should be decided by June or July.

18. (C) Despite media claims at the Vientiane summit that invitations to the EAS would be issued to India and others, Dennis does not believe that any decision has been made to invite other countries. New Zealand has not been invited and Dennis is not sure whether or not it would be. She said that the time had come for New Zealand officials to decide whether to lobby for an invitation, but she indicated that in general, New Zealand has been cautious about foisting itself onto ASEAN because the government believes the ASEAN agenda is overloaded as it is. For this reason, Prime Minister Clark had said in her statement in Vientiane that she would welcome the chance to participate in the ASEAN Summit again when it made sense to do so. Dennis explained the Prime Minister had in mind the conclusion of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement as an example of the kind of event that would logically lead to New Zealand's future participation in the summit.

Swindells